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Evaluating the impact of the Beginning Teacher Induction
Program on the Retention Rate of Beginning Teachers

By
Monica Lynn Shepherd

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2009

Approval Page

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Abstract

Evaluating the impact of the Beginning Teacher Induction Program on the Retention Rate of Beginning Teachers.
Shepherd, Monica Lynn, 2009: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University, EdD Beginning Teacher Support/Teacher Induction Program

This dissertation was designed to examine the Teacher Induction Program of a rural school system in North Carolina. The effects of mentor assignment, ongoing staff development, master teacher observation opportunities, structured reflection and self-assessment, and other support offered at the system level to beginning teachers on the retention rate of beginning teachers in the school system were analyzed.

The researcher determined 10 themes based on the objectives of the school system's Beginning Teacher Support Program: improving beginning teachers' skills and performance; supporting teacher morale; communications; collegiality; building a sense of professionalism and positive attitude; facilitating a smooth transition into the first and second years of teaching; putting theory into practice; preventing teacher isolation; building self-reflection; and retaining quality teachers. Data was gathered from stakeholders through surveys, focus group discussions and interviews and was analyzed for frequency of the themes.

An analysis of the data revealed that the Beginning Teacher Support Program was successful in reducing the attrition rate for beginning teachers in the school system.

Dedication

This work of labor is dedicated to my parents, Robert and Brenda Shepherd, who have inspired me through every step of my life. My every wish, dream, and achievement has been wholeheartedly supported by my parents. Throughout my life, as a child and as an adult, my parents have consistently challenged me to be the best. They have provided me with experiences and opportunities to accomplish everything I desire and my success is a result of their confidence in me. I thank God for giving me the best parents in the world.

Special gratitude is expressed to Dr. Doug Eury who advised me as a young master's student and encouraged me to become a doctoral candidate. His constant, quiet guidance has enabled me to complete this educational journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The teacher turnover rate in public schools is a growing problem across the United States. Bolich (2001) noted that the National Center for Education statistics found that a fourth of beginning teachers leave the classroom during the first 5 years to pursue other careers. Within the next decade, our nation's public schools will need to employ over two million teachers to accommodate the growing student enrollment, retiring teachers, and those new teachers who choose to leave the profession so quickly after entering (Feistritzer, 1999).

School systems across the country are constantly developing elaborate recruiting techniques while seeking solutions to new teacher attrition. Higher salaries, signing bonuses, moving assistance, low interest home loans, laptop computers, additional insurance, and payoff of student loans are all recruitment incentives that have helped to lure new teachers to various school systems. While recruiting teachers is important, retaining teachers is of equal significance in this growing concern. Efforts have been made to increase teacher retention through varied methods including monetary incentives, mentor assignment and new teacher induction programs. "Induction is the key

to retaining teachers" (Wong & Asquith, 2002, p. 1). New teacher induction programs are not only beneficial to beginning teachers, but to administrators, students, and the community because turnover rates decrease with induction programs in place (Mitchell, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to examine the teacher induction program of a rural school system in North Carolina. By determining the effects of mentor assignment, ongoing staff development, master teacher observation opportunities, structured reflection and self-assessment, and other support offered at the system level to beginning teachers, this study analyzed the effect of the Beginning Teacher Support Program on the retention rate of new teachers in the system.

Statement of the Problem

While the United States faces a nationwide teacher shortage, the beginning teachers who do choose to enter the education field are not remaining for very long. "According to a recent report released by the National Commission [on Teaching and America's Future], which examined teacher retention rates from 1987 to 2000, almost a third of new teachers leave the classroom after three years, and nearly 50% leave after five years" (Hayasaki, 2003, para. 14). Lack of consistency with the faculty from school to school

can wreak havoc on the success of students in the classroom. It is not possible to create or implement more intensive and consistent professional development, school improvement, and shared vision if one in three teachers do not continue to teach after 3 to 5 years (Brendle-Corum & Haynes, 2004).

Results from the 2002 North Carolina Teacher Turnover Report indicated that turnover rates varied by district with the lowest rate of 2.63% in Yancey County to 30.57% in Hertford County. Phil Kirk, Chairman of the North Carolina State Board of Education in 2002, stated,

With turnover rates this high, we need to recruit approximately 11,000 new teachers annually across the state. For some school districts however, their teacher ranks turn over every three to five years. This makes it very challenging to implement the kinds of improvements we want to see in our state, and for that reason, we must continue seeking ways to improve the stability of the teaching profession. (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2002, p. 1)

The 2004-2005 North Carolina Teacher Turnover Report published the turnover rates for each school district in North Carolina. Again, rates varied by district with Clay County reporting the lowest turnover rate at 3.96% and

Harnett County reporting the highest turnover rate at 28.51% (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2005). Again in 2006-2007, the North Carolina Teacher Turnover Report was released as a part of the Annual Report on the Reasons Teachers Leave the Profession and the lowest turnover rate was in Ashe County at 3.53% and the highest teacher turnover was in Harnett County with 26.23% (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2007). Although the rates varied from district to district, the range of turnover percentages experienced little change. While it seemed to be that a shortage of teachers was one of the primary causes of inadequate school performance, the common complaint is that if teacher education programs could only produce more teachers, the staff shortages that our schools face would cease to exist (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2007). However, Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that recent analysis of national data suggest that school staffing problems are not primarily due to teacher shortages; instead the data indicate that school staffing problems are, to a large extent, the result of a revolving door in our schools during the first 5 years of teachers' careers (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2007).

Teacher recruiting techniques seem to be increasing annually and budget allocations include appropriations for

travel to job fairs (in-state and out-of-state), signing bonuses, and moving costs. The State of North Carolina offers recruitment incentives through alternative entry licensure routes, regional licensing centers to assist lateral entry teachers, annual salary increases, 12% pay increase for National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification, 10% pay increase for teachers with master's degrees, teacher scholarship loans, special recognition and rewards programs, a statewide Center for Recruitment, Retention, Recognition and Professional Advancement, and a 3-year induction program including mentors for new teachers. Opportunities to increase pay rates and alternative licensure routes are becoming common in most districts and states. The teacher induction program is the component that serves as the most effective means of retaining teachers and is provided for all teachers in North Carolina by North Carolina State Board of Education Policy number QP-A-004 (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2006). The best foundation for beginning teachers is quality mentoring or induction programs (Bolich, 2001).

Teacher induction programs provide the support and guidance necessary for the success of a beginning teacher. High turnover is expensive, as well as a management

struggle for schools and school systems. Retaining excellent teachers is essential; therefore, many districts have created beginning teacher induction and mentoring programs which serve purposes such as smoothly welcoming new teachers into classrooms while providing a network of resources for guidance and support (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The need for teacher induction programs is evident.

Beginning teacher induction programs must encompass various strategies to combat the challenges that new teachers face daily. Wong (2001) simply defined induction as "the process of systematically training and supporting new teachers, beginning before the first day of school and continuing through the first two or three years of teaching" (para. 11).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the components of the teacher induction program that affect teacher retention in a school system in North Carolina. Retaining teachers is beneficial to the education provided to the students in the school system because teacher retention affects the consistency of instruction, promoting increased learning opportunities. The cost of teacher turnover can be measured in financial terms when school systems calculate the cost of everything involved in

replacing a teacher--rehiring costs, staff development costs and loss of resources invested in a teacher who is no longer employed. Increased teacher retention is also a major component in the impact on teacher morale in the school system.

Overview of Study Design and Procedures

This study examined the teacher induction program in a rural North Carolina school system through a program evaluation. The qualitative research includes data gathered by surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions which were analyzed to determine the relationship to the central themes. Surveys were sent to all beginning teachers in the school system for the 2006-07 and the 2007-08 school years. Interviews were conducted with central office personnel, including the assistant superintendent for human resources and mentor coordinator. Focus groups were convened for further discussion and those groups consisted of beginning teachers and mentors. The themes of improving beginning teachers' skills and performance; supporting teacher morale, communications, and collegiality; building a sense of professionalism and positive attitude; facilitating a smooth transition into the first and second years of teaching; putting theory into practice; preventing teacher isolation; building self-reflection; and, retaining quality

teachers were examined and analyzed.

The school system serves approximately 13,000 students at 22 schools with 759 certified employees. One of the primary components of the school system's teacher induction program is a mentor program that employs nine retired educators as mentors for beginning teachers in the school system.

Research Questions

There was one primary guiding question throughout the study: What is the impact of the teacher induction program on teacher retention?

Throughout the study, additional questions were also focused on to provide more specific insight into the overall success of the teacher induction program.

1. What were conditions that warranted an induction program?

2. What was the LEA doing to address teacher retention?

3. Was the teacher induction program being followed as designed?

4. Did the induction program meet its objective?

Limitations and Delimitations

Natural limitations included access to teachers who have already left the system and, therefore, allowed little

or no opportunity for data collection. Additional natural limitations were identified in the survey return response and completion rate for survey utilized to gather information from beginning teachers. Delimitations included a focus on one school system in the northwest region of North Carolina.

Teachers who leave the classroom can be assigned to one of three groups. In the first group are teachers who are no longer in the classroom due to external reasons (relocated due to spouse's job, stayed home to care for child or aging parent, or left for another reason not related to satisfaction at the school). The second group of teachers is comprised of teachers who left the classroom to pursue other opportunities in the education world (moved from one school to another, took a leave of absence to complete an advanced degree, or now work as administrators, counselors, or central office support staff). The third group is comprised of teachers who have left their chosen profession due to dissatisfaction (teachers who have made a choice to abandon the career that they have spent considerable time, money, and effort preparing for and are unwilling to spend further time pursuing happiness and satisfaction in the career choice of teaching).

Definition of Terms

ILT. Initially Licensed Teacher (no longer a current phrase, but was used to describe new teachers in North Carolina prior to 2006).

BT. Beginning Teacher (current phrase used to describe new teachers in North Carolina).

IGP. Individual Growth Plan (plan created by each teacher in North Carolina which documents goals and strategies for continuing professional growth).

SP1. Standard Professional 1 License which is valid for 3 years and is provided to individuals who have completed a North Carolina approved teacher education program at a regionally accredited college or university or another state's alternative licensure program, met the federal requirements to be designated as highly qualified and earned a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008).

SP2. Standard Professional 2 License which is valid for 5 years and is provided to teachers who are fully licensed and highly qualified in another state, have 3 or more years of teaching experience in another state, and meet North Carolina's Praxis testing requirements or have National Board Certification (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008).

INTASC Standards. Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Standards which provide information on the knowledge and skills a beginning teacher must have to be proficient in a classroom. INTASC standards are included in the beginning teacher's Individual Growth Plan annually (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2007).

Mentor. Experienced master teacher who assists beginning teachers with planning, classroom management, school culture, and other challenges faced by beginning teachers.

LEA. Local Education Agency (school system). There are 115 local education agencies in North Carolina.

Lateral Entry. Alternative pathway to becoming a classroom teacher for one who holds a bachelor's degree including a plan to complete the college coursework necessary to achieve teaching certification.

Retention. The rate at which teachers remain in the education profession.

Attrition. The rate at which teachers leave the education profession.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

This study examined and evaluated the teacher induction program of a local education agency in the northwest region of North Carolina. The retention and turnover rates and the opportunities offered to beginning teachers through the teacher induction program were researched and analyzed. The school system has created and implemented a new component of the Beginning Teacher Support Program beginning in the 2006-2007 school year which was the primary focus of the study.

The program evaluation included gathering data from beginning teachers through survey and focus group discussions. Focus groups were convened for further discussion and those groups consisted of beginning teachers and mentors. Interviews were conducted with central office personnel, including the assistant superintendent for human resources and mentor coordinator. The themes of improving beginning teachers' skills and performance; supporting teacher morale, communications, and collegiality; building a sense of professionalism and positive attitude; facilitating a smooth transition into the first and second years of teaching; putting theory into practice; preventing teacher isolation; building self-reflection; and retaining

quality teachers were examined and analyzed.

Introduction

More than one in three beginning teachers across the country leaves the profession prior to completing 5 years in the classroom (Bolich, 2001). The results of the turnover rate impact school systems in a multitude of areas, including fiscal and academic. Replacing teachers is increasingly costly to school systems that must recruit and retain new teachers annually (Wong, 2003). As a means of combating this growing challenge, school systems must seek ways to retain teachers. New teacher induction programs have enabled school districts to maintain a low teacher attrition rate through an organized, multi-year, sustained program to train, support, and retain new recruits (Wong).

The number of induction programs in school systems across the nation is constantly increasing, which attests to the value placed in the programs by school leaders and staff development facilitators (Wong, Britton, & Ganser, 2005). Beginning teacher induction programs are gaining momentum in the battle against the attrition rate. In the 2001-2002 school year, school districts with induction programs experienced very low teacher attrition rates: Lafourche Parish Schools in Louisiana hired 46 teachers and lost 1; Islip Public Schools in New York hired 68 teachers

and lost 3; Leyden High School District in Illinois hired 90 teachers and lost 4; and Newport-Mesa School District in California hired 148 teachers and lost 5 (Wong, 2004).

The development and implementation of a Beginning Teacher Support Program must be comprehensive and systematic. "Induction is a highly organized and comprehensive form of staff development, involving many people and components, that typically continues as a sustained process for the first two to five years of a teacher's career" (Wong et al., 2005, p. 379). With a clear plan in place, the execution of the process will benefit all involved, particularly, of course, the new teachers. New teacher induction programs should be linked to a vision guided by understanding of teacher learning, supported by a professional culture that encourages collaboration and inquiry, and should include strong administrative and mentor support, staff development beginning before the first teaching year, observation of effective teachers, as well as assessment and reflective evaluation opportunities (Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002).

Background and Significance

Although beginning teachers are anxious to start their career, a large number of new teachers find themselves quickly disenchanted with their chosen profession. Across

the country, about half of all new teachers leave the profession rather quickly due to poor working conditions, low salaries, a lack of administrative support and increasing amounts of paperwork (Brennan, 2007). This exodus is not uncommon in North Carolina. "The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey demonstrates what individuals familiar with the schools already know: teacher attrition is a serious problem facing many districts - and working conditions are a potentially powerful lever to help address the issue" (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2007, p. 10). With a constant revolving door of employees, the instructional program of schools will suffer. In our nation, new teachers and veteran teachers must be supported in a variety of ways to increase retention so that no child will be left behind, particularly in poverty-stricken and urban areas (Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002).

In his role as the director of K-12 Studies at the Center for Teacher Quality, Dr. Ken Futerneck researched the effects of the retention rate of California teachers on the academic performance of the students in the state.

The academic and social environment suffers from a lack of consistency and coherence because new arrivals are unfamiliar with the school's policies, its

curriculum and instructional practices, even its students. And when staff members are unfamiliar with one another, it becomes much harder to establish the kind of collaborative, mutually supportive professional environment that exists in most successful schools. (Futernick, 2007, pp. 11-12)

As teachers continue to leave the classroom, the cyclical effect of turnover continues to impact the schools. Simply adjusting to turnover is difficult for both teachers and students because the incoming teachers are often working to survive, including classroom management and reading textbook chapters just a few days in advance of the lesson (Silverman, 2007). Without a doubt, teacher attrition and the resulting teacher shortage will have a negative bearing throughout the educational community. We know that teacher shortages are a significant contributor to poor student achievement and that the shortages are due in large part to high teacher turnover rates (Futernick, 2007). When new teachers graduate from college, they have experienced a preparation program that includes time spent teaching in classrooms while supervised. Professional development activities provided while employed serve as further resources to develop skills and teaching strategies related to subject matter but are not sufficient

preparation for the rigors and obstacles faced each day in the classroom. A necessary transition from the theoretical study of teaching to the actual art is necessary to bridge the gap from learning how to teach and teaching to learn (Lippman, 2003).

While it is important to recruit new teachers, retaining those new teachers after they begin teaching is a key component to sustaining the teaching force (Bolich, 2001). The cost of teacher attrition and turnover is staggering. By combining the human resources expense and recruitment costs, the Alliance for Excellence in Education, based in Washington, DC, has totaled the national cost of annual teacher turnover to be \$2.2 billion (Silverman, 2007). School principals should be focusing on being the instructional leader of the school; however, due to high teacher turnover, principals must waste precious time replacing teachers, dealing with the hiring process and subsequent introduction responsibilities as the new hires settle into the school culture (Futernick, 2007). Furthermore, districts cannot afford to lose teachers, especially new ones, while simultaneously facing an increased number of teachers retiring, an increased student enrollment, and smaller class size limits (Brennan, 2007).

During the initial phase of their careers, beginning

teachers should experience the 2-5 year induction process provided by school districts with the goals of training, supporting, and retaining new teachers through an extensively planned, all-encompassing systematic network of ongoing professional development opportunities (Wong, 2004). By including all components in the Beginning Teacher Support Program, a positive, supportive environment is created for new teachers. Considering the current trends in teacher shortage and attrition rates, school leaders must constantly be cognizant of various methods of support for new teachers (Brendle-Corum & Haynes, 2004).

The content of induction programs should vary depending on the needs of the teachers, the goals of the school and the specific populations of students. Typically, programs contain elements of faculty and facility introduction, classroom management, student discipline, professional conduct, instructional techniques, school and district expectations, and professional obligations. (Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002, p. 2)

In examining the Alliance for Excellent Education (2005) study, Brennan (2007) found that turnover rates decreased by half when teacher induction programs components included mentoring, staff development, formal

assessment and veteran instructors as resources.

Collaboration, mentor assignment and staff development are the basis for a comprehensive beginning teacher induction program. To be successful, induction programs should be highly structured, similar to programs in Switzerland, Japan, France, New Zealand, and China where approaches are comprehensive, rigorous, seriously monitored, and focused on professional learning and collaboration (Wong et al., 2005).

Wong (Play for Keeps, 2002) described the initial days of too many new teachers as a very unfortunate process during which teachers are hired, assigned a classroom, and instructed to teach, without a single introduction to colleagues or even a tour of the school. Instead of isolating teachers, providing opportunities for collaboration and networking is a much more effective means for promoting professional relationships and increasing the retention rate. The Southern Regional Education Board, comprised of 16 member states, found that teachers are twice as likely to leave the classroom after their first year of teaching if they received no support or training (Brennan, 2007). The basic nature of the teacher induction program should provide constant and consistent team building and school culture enriching activities. "Because

new teachers want to be part of a team and part of a culture, the induction process should immerse them in the district's culture and unite them with everyone in the district as a cohesive, supportive instructional team" (Wong, *Induction Programs that Keep Working*, 2002, p. 43).

Induction programs provide support to newcomers of the teaching profession and allow them to develop into educators able to teach to today's high standards (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). The support offered to beginning teachers may be the sole reason one chooses to stay or leave after the first year, third year, or fifth year of teaching. Gingold (2004) examined the relationship shared by four first year teachers and the collaborative network that evolved and enabled them to encourage and support each other through the first few years of teaching. "When teachers collaborate, they learn" (Gingold, p. 1).

Mentoring is an obvious strong component of teacher induction programs. Teachers who teach other teachers serve not only to instruct but to provide dignity to the teaching profession (Wong, 2001). Beginning teachers rely heavily on the expertise of mentors, colleagues who already walked the same path and have found success in the classroom. New teachers in the Boston Public Schools reported receiving the majority of support from mentors, teachers, or

administrators at the school level (McCarthy & Guiney, 2004). Induction programs support beginning teachers by providing master teachers or mentors to provide professional encouragement which is essential as they begin managing their classrooms (Bulich, 2001). Wong (2002) has also cautioned administrators in the selection and assignment of mentors. "Mentors can offer important support for new teachers, but they must be carefully selected and highly trained, have a clear understanding of their purpose, and serve as contributing members of an overall comprehensive induction program" (Wong, 2002, Induction Programs that Keep Working, p. 47).

Induction programs are necessary because the completion of a teacher preparation program does not guarantee that the new teacher will be successful (Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002). While college programs provide a basic framework for educators, strategies for overcoming daily challenges in the classroom are not always included. A survey of teachers who had completed their first year of teaching in Boston Public Schools revealed that the most difficult teaching challenges included student behavior, classroom management, and discipline issues (McCarthy & Guiney, 2004). Staff development opportunities that actually meet the needs of beginning teachers must be

provided as part of the induction program. Beginning teachers benefit from a type of club networking format that encourages developing a social network, a support network and provides staff development opportunities that are specific to individual needs (Brendle-Corum & Haynes, 2004). School leaders must be diligent in instructing beginning teachers in procedures, policies, and the general aspects of a particular school culture. By training new teachers to meet the challenges of the classroom and comply with district and state standards, induction programs produce successful teachers (Wong, 2004). Professional development opportunities that are on-target and correlated to the needs of beginning teachers increase overall performance of both teachers and students. "Enhanced teacher quality leads to greater student achievement, and when teachers are more effective in the classroom, they tend to stay longer in their positions, which greatly helps the overall school culture" (Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002, p. 10).

The benefits of beginning teacher induction programs are numerous. However, a comprehensive, systematic and detailed program is imperative for positive results. Induction is more than just a single day of orientation or a mentor assignment, which are simply components of a more

organized, developed and ongoing process (Wong, Play for Keeps, 2002). A beneficial induction program is multifaceted and does not rely on one component for success. Mentors cannot replace the induction program, which should be a highly organized process that integrates systematic, specific professional development and other focused components provided by many people over the course of 5 years (Wong, 2003). A school system with a plan to support a beginning teacher solely through mentor assignment will not experience the benefits inherent in a complete induction program. A mentor assignment is not a successful solution to the challenges and discouragement that contribute to the attrition rate of new teachers (Wong, 2001). In the University of Chicago's Consortium on Chicago School Research involving a survey of 1,700 beginning teachers, it was discovered that fully-funded mentor programs have little success without increased focus from administrators (Silverman, 2007).

Summary and Conclusions

All induction programs are not alike and rightfully so when considering the local school and district culture and challenges (Wong, Play for Keeps, 2002). School systems are diverse and effective school leaders are knowledgeable of the needs for new teachers in their respective areas.

School districts with formal and comprehensively structured teacher induction programs in place and practice lose very few teachers annually (Wong, 2004). All thriving beginning teacher induction programs do share a few basic components.

Beginning teacher support should be looked at as a continuum, starting with personal and emotional support, expanding to include specific task or problem-related support and, in the ideal, expanding to further help the newcomer develop a capacity for critical self reflection on teaching practice.

(Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000, p. 4)

Support for beginning teachers, personally and professionally, is a crucial component of all induction programs. Induction is a lifelong experience, a process that teaches the social and cultural practices that center around learning - what it means to be a learner and what it means to help others learn (Wong & Wong, 1997).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Problem to be Addressed

The rate of teacher turnover in North Carolina is a challenge – financially and academically. Bolich (2001) analyzed the supply and demand studies conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board and found that almost half of beginning teachers left teaching in the state where they began their teaching career. As teachers leave the profession, they take with them the professional knowledge they have acquired through staff development, school-based meetings, and advanced education ventures. The personal knowledge a teacher has developed through time in the classroom, hours spent working individually with students, and communication with parents is also lost. Both the professional and personal knowledge that disappears when a teacher leaves the profession is costly. Ingersoll and Smith determined that a growing number of schools and districts have implemented new teacher induction programs and/or mentoring programs to combat the rising financial and managerial turnover costs and to increase the retention rate by establishing a support network providing guidance and assistance for new teachers to access as they transition from college to classrooms (ResearchBrief, 2005). As teacher turnover rates increase, the academic

progress of students may decrease. Students received the most benefits of carefully structured induction processes because their teachers experienced opportunities for ongoing professional growth activities which promote lifelong learning and sustained development of instructional strategies, curriculum knowledge and effective classroom management practices (Wong, *Induction Programs that Keep Working*, 2002).

Research Questions

There was one primary guiding question throughout the study: What is the impact of the teacher induction program on teacher retention? Teachers who did not participate in induction programs and have less than 5 years teaching experience are twice as likely to leave teaching (Bolich, 2001). Throughout the study, additional questions were also a focus to provide more specific insight into the overall success of the teacher induction program.

1. What were conditions that warranted an induction program?

2. What was the LEA doing to address teacher retention?

3. Was the teacher induction program being followed as designed?

4. Did the induction program meet its objective?

Study Design

The design of this study was a program evaluation study, following the CIPP model of examining the context, input, process and product of the teacher induction program. A program evaluation was the most apparent method of study to utilize based on information needed from individuals in the school system including central office personnel, mentors, and beginning teachers. Qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed. The CIPP model allowed responses to be gathered through interviews, focus groups, and surveys which were then analyzed to determine recurrent themes.

In an examination by the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality of the 2004 Teacher Working Conditions Survey results, it was determined that teacher shortage is a challenging issue in North Carolina with a state turnover average at 12% and some districts with 24% of teachers leaving the classroom (Hirsh, 2004). Based on information gathered by The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, up to half of the teachers leave their classroom in researched schools annually (Hirsh). In the focus school system, the turnover rate has decreased for the past 4 years. In 2006-2007, an important component of the teacher induction program was changed. Instead of assigning full-time

teachers as mentors, retired master teachers were hired on a part-time basis to serve as mentors for beginning teachers. Induction programs provide several benefits, including retention of new teachers, more effective teaching, and leadership opportunities for veteran teachers who become mentors (Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002).

Input was gathered through surveys of beginning teachers, separate focus groups for beginning teachers and mentors, and interviews of the mentor coordinator and the associate superintendent of human resources to determine the actual procedures the school system was utilizing to retain teachers. Surveys were distributed to beginning teachers from the 2006-2007 and the 2007-2008 school years. Focus group discussions and interviews with beginning teachers, mentors, and central office personnel also provided data on policies, procedures, and components of the execution of the Beginning Teacher Support Program. Through analysis of responses from the survey, interviews, and focus groups, the key themes were identified.

The process of the program evaluation allowed the researcher to determine if the teacher induction program was being followed as designed. By analyzing the components of the program including mentor assignment, master teacher observation, structured reflection and self-assessment,

professional networking opportunities through survey, interview and focus group responses, the researcher further evaluated the impact of the program in correlation to the key themes.

Finally, the product allowed the researcher to determine if the teacher induction program met the objective of lowering the school system's turnover rate and retaining teachers. Through the oral and written participant responses and the resulting key themes, it was effortless to determine if attitudes were changed or improved and satisfaction was increased.

Teachers with a more accurate perception of the school's professional culture, students' academic and behavioral needs, and formal and informal supports available to them were more likely to view aspects of their position more favorably and to plan to remain in their positions in future years. (McCarthy & Guiney, 2004, p. 4)

Participants

The school system is in a rural area in the northwest region of North Carolina. Geographically, the county is rather large with one county school system and no city school districts. Twenty-two schools comprise the district including thirteen elementary schools, four middle schools,

and five high schools (one of which is a career and technical education magnet school). In the 2006-2007 school year, the school system employed 765 teachers.

Beginning with the 2001-2002 school year and ending with the 2005-2006 school year, the 5-year teacher turnover rate was 12.89%. During 2005-2006, the last school year of that 5-year cycle, 95 teachers out of 759 employed teachers left the school system, creating a 12.52% turnover rate. Only 8 of those teachers had tenure; 87 were beginning teachers or initially certified teachers.

As part of the effort to improve teacher quality and provide educators with the support and guidance they need to remain in the classroom, [the school system] began a new approach to mentoring for all first and second year beginning teachers beginning with the 2006-2007 school year. (Scott, 2008, p. 3)

An induction program is a message that a school district cares about and values its employees while encouraging success and leadership (Wong, 2004).

Recognizing that a solid induction program includes a strong mentor component to support and encourage beginning teachers, the school system created goals and objectives for the Beginning Teacher Support Program. A successful induction program should have a defined mission and goals

to include training and guidance on the transition into teaching, school and district culture, classroom management, and effective teaching techniques, rather than just an assignment of a mentor (Wong, 2001). The goals of the school system's Beginning Teacher Support Program included: hiring retired master teachers to mentor first and second year beginning teachers; providing veteran teachers the opportunity to share their experience and expertise with beginning teachers; matching the mentor and mentee certification areas; coordinating and ensuring high quality mentoring; assisting beginning teachers in defining and developing effective instructional practices and classroom management techniques; assisting beginning teachers with effective performance of their duties and responsibilities; and increasing teacher retention in the profession (Scott, 2008). From his research in California, Dr. Ken Futernick (2007) determined that a critical component of retention is a strong professional relationship among teachers. It is critically important for the Beginning Teacher Induction Plan to be systematically implemented. "With an expertly developed and organized plan, a teacher induction program can promote lifelong learning and consistent opportunities for teachers to grow professionally" (Wong, 2004, p. 107).

Program objectives for the Beginning Teacher Support Program were identified and included: improving beginning teachers' skills and performance; supporting teacher morale, communications, and collegiality; building a sense of professionalism and positive attitude; facilitating a smooth transition into the first and second years of teaching; putting theory into practice; preventing teacher isolation; building self-reflection; and retaining quality teachers (Scott, 2008). An induction program that is multifaceted is most beneficial to beginning teachers. By providing intensive professional development, initiating networking opportunities, encouraging collaboration, allowing new teachers to observe and be observed, and creating learning communities, leaders are created and motivated (Wong, 2004). Retaining teachers is of extreme importance to the quality of education that students receive. "When teachers leave a school, students are frequently forced to attend classes with inexperienced, underprepared teachers until qualified replacements can be found" (Futernick, 2007, p. 11).

Knowledge of curriculum and familiarity of system processes and procedures are important in the mentor assignments. A supportive and encouraging atmosphere is crucial to the mentor/beginning teacher relationship. The

school system has developed and implemented a program that hires retired master teachers to mentor beginning teachers and provides veteran teachers with opportunities to share experiences with beginning teachers (Scott, 2008).

Furthermore, the school system strives "to match the mentor and mentee certification areas" (Scott, p. 4). In a study of the Boston Public Schools, McCarthy and Guiney (2004) found that the most beneficial mentor assignment for new teachers was a mentor who taught the same subject and grade level.

The participants of the study included beginning teachers, mentors, and central office personnel who were involved in the Beginning Teacher Support Program in the focus school system. All beginning teachers were provided the opportunity to complete the survey. Beginning teachers were randomly selected to receive invitations to focus group discussions and were representative of the elementary, middle, and high school levels. All mentors were included in the research. The school system mentor coordinator and the assistant superintendent for human resources were included in the interview process.

Procedures

The program evaluation began with an examination of the beginning teacher induction program, focusing on goals

and objectives created to support beginning teachers. The researcher then employed surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions to gather information related to the Beginning Teacher Support Program and the processes and procedures the school system has developed and implemented to reduce teacher attrition. The beginning teachers were surveyed to determine if the teacher induction program is being followed as designed with goals and objectives as the focus of the program. Focus groups consisting of beginning teachers and mentors were convened, and the discussions were recorded and transcribed. The scripts were analyzed for key themes and to determine relevance and importance of those themes.

The survey consisted of statements that are based on the eight objectives of the Beginning Teacher Support Program: improving beginning teachers' skills and performance; supporting teacher morale, communications, and collegiality; building a sense of professionalism and positive attitude; facilitating a smooth transition into the first and second years of teaching; putting theory into practice; preventing teacher isolation; building self-reflection; and retaining quality teachers (Scott, 2008). Each objective of the Beginning Teachers Support Program has at least four survey statements that pertain to it (see

Appendixes A and B).

The survey was distributed to beginning teachers who were first year teachers during the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. The beginning teachers indicated their responses to the statements utilizing a 5-point Likert scale. Upon completion of the survey, the beginning teachers submitted the survey to the researcher through email, the school system courier, or United States postal service. The survey responses were tabulated and analyzed based on the 8 objectives of the Beginning Teacher Support Program. Two open-ended questions were included in the survey for additional concerns and comments that beginning teachers have about the Beginning Teacher Program and the mentor relationship. Responses for the open-ended questions were analyzed based on the coordination to the 8 objectives of the Beginning Teacher Support Program. Each objective served as a theme and the survey results determined if examination of additional themes was warranted. Ten themes emerged through the data analysis process. The Beginning Teacher Support Program objective of supporting teacher morale, communications, and collegiality was separated into 3 themes.

The focus group and interview questions were scripted and open-ended to allow for responses focused on the topic.

The focus groups and interviews were conducted in a central location convenient to the schedules of all involved. The focus group questions were designed as prompts to encourage open dialogue between participants (see Appendixes C and D for complete list of questions). The interview questions allowed the central office leaders to more clearly define and explain the Beginning Teacher Support Program (see Appendixes E and F for complete list of questions). The interview responses and focus group dialogues were transcribed and key themes (Beginning Teacher Support Program objectives) were identified. The thematic responses were weighted as to importance of key themes based on whether a particular response was simply mentioned or was discussed in length or mentioned more than once throughout the length of the focus group discussion.

With data from surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions, the themes were evident. Dominant themes were those that were recurring throughout the data-gathering process. Triangulation of the data allowed the researcher to analyze the themes and effects of those themes on the impact of the Beginning Teacher Support Program.

Instruments

The turnover history of the school system was analyzed using information from the *System Level Teacher Turnover*

Report which is prepared annually by the Public Schools of North Carolina in the Division of Human Resource Management. The *North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey*, commissioned by Governor Mike Easley bi-annually also provided additional data gathered through anonymous survey of the teachers in North Carolina.

The survey used by the researcher to gather information from beginning teachers who completed their first year of teaching in the school system during the 2006-2007 or 2007-2008 school years utilized a Likert scale. Teachers were asked to rate 40 items on the survey with the following responses:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

Each item was scored and ranked based on the responses. The last two items of the survey were open-ended questions and the responses were utilized to identify further themes if necessary.

Survey statements 7, 12, 13, 14, 18, 20, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, and 37 addressed the Beginning Teacher Support Program Objective of improving teachers' skills and

performance. The second objective, supporting teacher morale, communications, and collegiality was addressed in survey statements 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 17, 21, 22, and 23. Survey statements 3, 4, 8, 18, 24, 25, 28, and 29 allowed the researcher to gather data pertaining to the third objective, building a sense of professionalism and positive attitude. The fourth objective of the Beginning Teacher Support program, facilitating a smooth transition into the first and second years of teaching, was the focus of survey statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10. Statements 12, 15, 16, 19, 26, 27, 33, and 37 concentrated on the fifth objective, putting theory into practice. Preventing teacher isolation, the sixth objective, was addressed with survey statements 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 20, 36, 38, and 39. In survey statements 15, 16, 19, and 30, the researcher focused on the seventh objective, building self-reflection. The final objective, retaining quality teachers, was addressed in survey statements 9, 17, 31, 34, 35, and 40. Survey questions 41 and 42 were open-ended and responses for each question were evaluated and assigned to one of the established key themes, based on Beginning Teacher Support Program objectives. If responses to survey questions 41 and 42 did not correlate with any of the predetermined key themes, additional themes would have been added. Instead,

responses to survey questions were included in the themes already established by the objectives of the school system's Beginning Teacher Support Program.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Beginning Teacher Support Program in the school system using the CIPP model for the program evaluation. The results of the study illustrated the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the Beginning Teacher Support Program in lowering the turnover rate for the school system. The school system will be able to review the results of the surveys, interviews, and focus groups and plan adjustments to the program if necessary. The school system will be able to determine if the services and procedures that were prescribed in the Beginning Teacher Support Program were actually successfully implemented. Additional support needed to lower the attrition rate for beginning teachers has become apparent through the research.

Chapter 4: Results of the Study

The teacher turnover rate in public schools is a growing problem across the United States. Bolich (2001) noted that the National Center for Education statistics found that a fourth of beginning teachers leave the classroom during the first 5 years to pursue other careers. Within the next decade, our nation's public schools will need to employ over two million teachers to accommodate the growing student enrollment, retiring teachers, and those new teachers who choose to leave the profession so quickly after entering (Feistritzer, 1999). While the United States faces a nationwide teacher shortage, the beginning teachers who do choose to enter the education field are not remaining for very long. "According to a recent report released by the National Commission [of Teaching and America's Future], which examined teacher retention rates from 1987 to 2000, almost a third of new teachers leave the classroom after three years, and nearly 50% leave after five years" (Hayasaki, 2003, para. 14). Teacher induction programs provide the support and guidance necessary for the success of a beginning teacher. Retaining excellent teachers is essential; therefore, many districts have created beginning teacher induction and mentoring programs which serve purposes such as smoothly welcoming new

teachers into classrooms while providing a network of resources for guidance and support (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The need for teacher induction programs is evident.

Overview of the Data Collection Process

The study of the impact of the teacher induction program on the retention of the local education agency in northwest North Carolina was conducted involving all stakeholders of the teacher induction program. The research was conducted utilizing the CIPP program evaluation concept through which the context, input, process, and product of the program were analyzed.

The data collection involved several different processes: surveys of beginning teachers from the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years; focus group discussions with beginning teachers; focus group discussion with mentors; interview with mentor coordinator; and interview with assistant superintendent for human resources.

The survey was sent to every beginning teacher from both the 2006-2007 and the 2007-2008 school years, including those teachers who are no longer employed by the school system. Respondents were provided with three options of returning surveys--by mail, by school system courier, and by email. Those beginning teachers who wished to remain completely anonymous during the survey process could do so

by returning the survey through the postal service or school system courier with no return address.

To populate the beginning teacher focus groups, a random sampling of beginning teachers, 25%, were invited to the focus group for each beginning year of employment-- 2006-2007, and 2007-2008. Invitations to be involved in the focus groups explained the purpose for the discussion and allowed the beginning teacher to choose whether or not to attend. Upon accepting the invitation and attending the focus group discussion, beginning teachers were reassured that their comments would be analyzed as a group, without identifying the comments of each individual person. To further the attempt of putting the beginning teachers at ease, no record of attendance at the focus groups was created and no names were recorded.

All of the mentors for the school system were invited to the focus group discussion. Every mentor employed by the school system was in attendance for the focus group discussion with the exception of three. As with the beginning teachers, the mentors were informed that their comments would be analyzed as a group, without identifying details pertaining to a specific mentor. Again, no record of attendance was created for the mentor focus group and no names were recorded.

The interviews were held individually with the mentor coordinator and the assistant superintendent for human resources, each in their respective offices. Only the researcher and the interviewee were present during each interview.

The surveys allowed beginning teachers to respond, using a Likert scale, to statements which correlated to the objectives of the school system's Beginning Teacher Support Program. The focus group discussions and interview sessions allowed the participants, including beginning teachers, mentors, the mentor coordinator and the assistant superintendent for human resources to answer open-ended questions which were designed to prompt discussion of the different components of the Beginning Teacher Support Program. Analysis of the data gathered through surveys, focus groups, and interviews focused on 10 themes that were derived from the school system's Beginning Teacher Support Program objectives. Those themes were skills and performance, morale, communication, collegiality, professionalism, transition into teaching, theory into practice, isolation, self-reflection and retention.

Participants

The research involved beginning teachers, mentors, the mentor coordinator, and the assistant superintendent for

human resources, all of whom were from the same local education agency. The beginning teachers were teachers who were employed as beginning teachers during the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. While not all beginning teachers who were employed during those school years remain employed by the school system, they were all nonetheless provided with the opportunity to participate in both the survey process and the focus group discussions. The mentors for the local education agency were all retired master teachers and were all invited to participate in the focus group discussion. Although almost all were present for the focus group discussion, prior commitments and sickness prevented three from participating. The mentor coordinator is a long-term employee of the school systems, with various positions and responsibilities in the past. The mentor coordinator has been serving in that position since the 2008-2009 school year and serves as supervisor for the mentors. The assistant superintendent for human resources has been in the position for several years and is responsible for initial contact, hiring, and management of beginning teacher files.

Data Analysis

The surveys were collected through email, mail, and school system courier. Once collected, the survey responses

were analyzed for goodness of fit utilizing chi square. The researcher audio taped and transcribed each focus group discussion and interview. Responses were analyzed based on the objectives of the school system's Beginning Teacher Support Program. All stakeholders in the Beginning Teacher Support Program were provided the opportunity to be involved in the data collection as beginning teachers, mentors, the mentor coordinator and the assistant superintendent for human resources were all included in either a survey and/or focus group discussion, or an interview session. The results of the research are reported based on the research questions.

Research Question 1. What were conditions that warranted an induction program?

The school system recognized the need for providing direct support to beginning teachers as a way of combating national attrition rates (Scott, 2008).

As part of the effort to improve teacher quality and provide educators with the support and guidance they need to remain in the classroom, [Focus School System] began a new approach to mentoring for all first and second year beginning teachers beginning with the 2006-2007 school year. (Scott, p. 1)

As indicated in Chapter 2, school systems cannot

afford to lose teachers, especially new ones, while simultaneously facing an increased number of teachers retiring, an increase in student enrollment, and smaller class size limits (Brennan, 2007). The focus school system recognizes that the loss of a new teacher due to minimal support and guidance during the beginning years is a "tragic loss that can be avoided" (Scott, 2008, p. 1).

Research Question 2. What was the LEA doing to address teacher retention?

The Beginning Teacher Support Program for the focus school system included goals of hiring retired master teachers to mentor beginning teachers which allowed veteran teachers the opportunity to share their experience and expertise with beginning teachers (Scott, 2008). Statement number 20 on the Survey for Beginning Teachers indicated that 44.44% of the beginning teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they had received assistance from their mentor in preparing for classroom observations. Beginning Teachers Survey statement number 37 requested beginning teachers to indicate whether their instructional technique has improved as a result of guidance from their mentor and 55.56% of the beginning teachers agreed or strongly agreed as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

*Frequency of Positive Responses from Survey Items
Referencing Mentors Sharing Expertise*

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
20. Mentor helped prepare for classroom observations	27.77%	16.67%	44.44%
37. Instructional technique improved as a result of mentor guidance	38.89%	16.67%	55.56%

Another goal in the Beginning Teacher Support Program was matching the mentor and mentee certification areas (Scott, 2008). Based on statement number 12 from the Beginning Teachers Survey, 44% of the beginning teachers indicated by disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that their mentor has experience in the same grade level/subject. With 16.66% of the beginning teachers neither agreeing nor disagreeing, 38.88% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their mentor has experience in the same grade level/subject. During the beginning teacher focus group discussions, a beginning teacher stated,

I thought the mentor that was assigned to you would be in your own concentration and I think that would have been a little more helpful, having had someone to answer questions to who was in the discipline that you were teaching. (Anonymous, personal communication, January 28, 2009)

Another beginning teacher made the following comment in the same beginning teacher focus group discussion. "As a PreK teacher, it was different because my mentor was another PreK teacher and I was lucky that I made it through the first year because of her" (Anonymous, personal communication).

Coordinating and ensuring high quality mentoring was also a goal of the school system's Beginning Teacher Support Program (Scott, 2008). Induction programs support beginning teachers by providing master teachers or mentors who provide professional encouragement which is essential as they begin managing their classrooms (Bolich, 2001). Table 2 indicates the responses to the Beginning Teachers Survey pertaining to high quality mentoring.

Table 2

*Frequency of Positive Responses from Survey Items
Referencing High Quality Mentoring*

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
11. Time reserved weekly to meet with mentor	50%	16.7%	66.7%
13. Mentor meets on a regular basis	72.2%	16.7%	88.9%
14. Mentor is available at times other than meeting times if needed	50%	22.2%	72.2%
23. Mentor is primary person sought for challenges/concerns/problems	16.7%	11.1%	27.8%
24. Mentor celebrates accomplishments	61.1%	22.2%	83.3%
35. Feel supported by mentor	61.1%	38.9%	100%

In analyzing the responses from the Beginning Teachers Survey noted in Table 2, two-thirds of the beginning teachers indicated in statement number 11 that time was reserved in their weekly schedules to meet with mentors. Even more beginning teachers, 88.89%, responded in survey statement number 13 that their mentor meets with them on a regular basis, with 72.22% of beginning teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing that their mentor is available at times other than meeting times if additional assistance is needed. Mentors are not the primary people who are sought by beginning teachers when they are experiencing

challenges/concerns/problems as illustrated by survey statement number 23 with only 27.78% of beginning teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing. During the focus group discussions, beginning teachers conveyed a desire for mentors to be available at the school site each day. One beginning teacher stated, "Sometimes there are questions that you need an answer before the end of the day. Sometimes you need to be able to ask something and get an answer" (Anonymous, personal communication, January 28, 2009). In survey statement number 24, 83.33% of beginning teachers agree or strongly agree that their mentor celebrates accomplishments with them and survey statement number 35 indicates that all, or 100% of beginning teachers feel supported by their mentor.

As part of the Beginning Teacher Support Program, mentors were expected to assist beginning teachers in defining and developing effective instructional practices and classroom management techniques (Scott, 2008). None of the beginning teachers provided a negative response to survey statement number 15 indicating that mentors have encouraged beginning teachers to reflect on successes and challenges in the classroom. Over half of the beginning teachers, 55.55%, believed that their instructional technique has improved as a result of guidance from their

mentor, as indicated by responses to survey statement number 37. Only one in six beginning teachers disagreed with the Beginning Teachers Survey statement number 7--classroom management was addressed at orientation. As indicated in the Mentor Focus group discussion, mentors were involved in the orientation process in the focus school system.

Mentors in the focus school system were also expected, as one of the goals of the Beginning Teacher Support Program, to assist beginning teachers with effective performance of their duties and responsibilities (Scott, 2008). Survey statement number 20 requested beginning teachers to determine if their mentor helped them prepare for classroom observations; less than 1% (0.05) of beginning teachers indicated that their mentors did not help them prepare for classroom observations. Over half of beginning teachers, 55.56%, indicated that their instructional technique has improved as a result of guidance from their mentors, as noted in survey statement number 37.

The final goal of the focus school system's Beginning Teacher Support Program was to increase teacher retention in the profession (Scott, 2008). In our nation, new teachers and veteran teachers must be supported in a

variety of ways to increase retention so that no child will be left behind, particularly in poverty-stricken and urban areas (Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002). Beginning Teacher Survey statement number 40 requested beginning teachers to indicate whether or not they planned to teach in the school system for 5 more years. With 11.11% of the beginning teachers undecided, 16.67% of the beginning teachers agreed and 38.89% of the beginning teachers strongly agreed to continue teaching in the school system for 5 more years.

Research Question 3. Was the teacher induction program being followed as designed?

The Beginning Teacher Support Program of the focus school system has identified program objectives, noted in Table 3.

Table 3

School System Beginning Teacher Support Program Objectives

-
- Improving beginning teachers' skills and performance
 - Supporting teacher morale, communications, and collegiality
 - Building a sense of professionalism and positive attitude
 - Facilitating a smooth transition into the first and second years of teaching
 - Putting theory into practice
 - Preventing teacher isolation
 - Building self-reflection
 - Retaining quality teachers
-

The objectives of the school system's Beginning Teacher Support Program were utilized to generate themes.

Ten themes were identified and the transcripts of the beginning teacher focus groups, mentor focus group, mentor coordinator interview and the assistant superintendent for human resources interview were analyzed for recurrence of the themes. Table 4 presents the frequency of each theme documented in the focus groups. Table 5 indicates the frequency of themes in the interviews.

Table 4

Frequency of Themes in Beginning Teachers and Mentor Focus Group Discussions

	Beginning Teachers 2006-07	Beginning Teachers 2007-08	Mentors	Totals/ Percentage
Skills and performance	26	32	14	72/7.65%
Morale	20	111	25	156/16.6%
Communication	56	95	53	204/21.7%
Collegiality	9	47	3	59/6.28%
Professionalism	2	39	4	45/4.79%
Transition	31	68	32	131/13.94%
Theory to practice	34	61	42	137/14.57%
Isolation	8	73	23	104/11.06%
Self-reflection	0	24	1	25/2.66%
Retention	1	6	0	7/0.74%

With 940 responses coded, Table 4 illustrates that the communication theme was discussed more frequently during the focus group discussion. When coding the focus group

discussion transcripts, conversations that mentioned asking questions, receiving help, thoughts and comments vocalized by mentors and beginning teachers, email correspondence, telephone phone calls, clarifying issues, understanding or misunderstanding expectations and responsibilities were considered pertaining to the communication theme. Retention was not mentioned or alluded to during the mentor focus group discussion and less than 1% of the discussion in the Beginning Teacher focus groups was devoted to retention in comparison to the other themes.

Table 5

Frequency of Themes in Interviews

	Mentor Coor.	Assistant Supt	Totals	Percentages
Skills and performance	1	4	5	2.6%
Morale	4	5	9	4.7%
Communication	27	24	51	26.4%
Collegiality	10	11	21	10.9%
Professionalism	5	13	18	9.3%
Transition	26	14	40	20.7%
Theory to practice	17	7	24	12.4%
Isolation	2	9	11	5.7%
Self-reflection	6	0	6	3.1%
Retention	0	8	8	4.1%

Clearly, communication and transition are key components of the Beginning Teacher Support Program as

evidenced by the percentages from the interview with the mentor coordinator and the assistant superintendent for human resources. The two school system leaders dedicated 47.1% of their comments to communication and transition during the interviews. A necessary transition from the theoretical study of teaching to the actual art is necessary to bridge the gap from learning how to teach to begin teaching to learn (Lippman, 2003). The mentor coordinator stressed the importance of helping to ease the beginning teachers into the new school system atmosphere by including all directors in the orientation prior to the beginning of the first year of teaching. She explained, "Every director addresses the group and speaks with them and allows them time just to get to know their program as well as time to ask any questions or any handouts or anything that might be available" (B. J. Scott, personal communication, February 9, 2009).

Research Question 4. Did the induction program meet its objective?

The school system has determined four areas of focus for evaluation of the Beginning Teacher Support Program: retaining quality teachers; improving instructional performance; supporting teacher morale, communication, and collegiality; and facilitating a seamless transition into

the first year of teaching (Scott, 2008).

Table 6 refers to the frequency retention was discussed by beginning teachers, mentors, the mentor coordinator, and the assistant superintendent for human resources. Retention was the least discussed topic in any of the focus group discussions or interview sessions.

Table 6

Frequency of Retention Theme in Focus Groups and Interviews

	Number	Percentage
Beginning teachers 2006-2007	1	.5%
Beginning teachers 2007-2008	6	1.1%
Mentors	0	0%
Mentor coordinator	0	0%
Assistant superintendent	8	8.4%

Beginning Teacher Survey statement number 40 requested beginning teachers to indicate whether or not they planned to teach in the school system for 5 more years. With 11.11% of the beginning teachers undecided, 16.67% of the beginning teachers agreed and 38.89% of the beginning teachers strongly agreed to continue teaching in the school system for 5 more years.

Improving the instructional performance of beginning teachers was referenced in survey statements 16, 19, 26, 30, 33, and 37. Survey statement number 16 requested

beginning teachers to indicate if reflection of the impact of classroom activities is part of their daily or weekly routine. Only one beginning teacher indicated that reflection was not part of the daily or weekly routine by disagreeing to survey statement number 16. Table 7 illustrates the positive responses of the beginning teachers to survey statements 19, 26, 30, 33, 37 as each survey item pertains to improving instructional practice.

Table 7

*Frequency of Positive Responses from Survey Items
Referencing Improving Instructional Practice*

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Principal encourages reflection of instruction	66.7%	11.1%	77.8%
Principal encourages staff Development to enhance instructional technique	44.4%	44.4%	88.8%
Staff Development includes Reflection of successes and challenges	38.9%	16.7%	55.6%
Implementation of Instructional strategies From staff development	55.6%	33.3%	88.9%
Mentor guidance improved Instructional technique	38.9%	16.7%	55.6%

Supporting teacher morale, communication, and collegiality was a theme that was very prevalent in both beginning teacher focus groups, the mentor focus groups, the responses to the Beginning Teachers Survey, and the

interviews of the mentor coordinator and the assistant superintendent for human resources. While coding the transcripts of the focus groups and interviews, expressed feelings of frustration or celebration as well as mention of being overwhelmed with the amount of work and responsibilities were considered the focus for the teacher morale theme. The communication theme included telephone calls, visits, conversations, questions, answers, and emails. Collegiality was considered when there was mention of teamwork, collaboration, grade level planning, and assisting colleagues.

As illustrated in Table 8, the theme discussed most in focus groups and interviews was communication. The mentor coordinator explained,

I also feel that access is one of the merits of our program because our people are very committed and compassionate with their teachers and provide their cell phone number, they provide their email address, and they are virtually available for our people twenty-four hours a day. (B. J. Scott, personal communication, February 9, 2009)

Table 8

Frequency of Communication Theme in Focus Groups and Interviews

	Number	Percentage
Beginning teachers 2006-2007	56	29.9%
Beginning teachers 2007-2008	95	17.1%
Mentors	53	26.9%
Mentor coordinator	27	27.6%
Assistant superintendent	24	25.3%

Communication comprised almost one-third of one of the beginning teacher focus groups. One beginning teacher expressed appreciation for the mentor who worked diligently to find the answers to questions by saying, "She was so helpful in finding answers to questions that she could not answer. She would go and ask the principal or assistant principal and try her best to find the answer. I appreciate that" (Anonymous, personal communication, January 28, 2009).

Facilitating a seamless transition into the first year of teaching was coded in the focus group and interview transcripts when subjects discussed time with mentors, time constraints in completing all duties and responsibilities, suggestions for improving the Beginning Teacher Support Program, and differences between college preparation and

beginning year of teaching. During focus group discussions, beginning teachers made various suggestions for improving the Beginning Teacher Support Program. Suggestions included providing different professional development during the orientation prior to the first year of teaching, assigning mentors with the same teaching background, better scheduling of mentor visits to the classroom, and hiring more mentors so they would have more time to spend at each school. One beginning teacher commented, "I think it would be nice if we had more mentors" (Anonymous, personal communication, January 28, 2009).

The following tables, Tables 9-16, represent chi square values on all Beginning Teachers Survey statements as related to each Beginning Teacher Support Program Objective. This means that if the survey was repeated a number of times, one could assume similar responses would be provided as related to the significance of each item. This data was used to draw conclusions as to significance of responses. The perceptions of 17 of the survey statements appeared to be of significant importance to the beginning teachers as reported by the chi square analysis.

Table 9

Significance of Survey Statement Responses in Relation to Improving Beginning Teachers' Skills and Performance

Survey Statement	Chi Square Values	Asymp. Sig.
7. Classroom management at orientation	3.778	.286
12. Mentor experience in same grade/subject	2.556	.635
13. Mentor meets on regular basis	22.000	.000
14. Mentor available at other times	7.333	.062
18. Principal accessible	13.111	.004
20. Mentor helped prepare for classroom observations	7.778	.051
26. Principal encourages staff development	10.889	.012
27. Self selection of staff development	8.111	.088
28. School staff development relevant	6.444	.092
29. System staff development relevant	4.667	.198
31. Staff Development throughout year	6.333	.042
32. Staff Development at beginning of year only	4.000	.135
37. Instructional technique improved with mentor guidance	2.444	.485

Thirteen survey statements pertained to the Beginning Teacher Support Program objective of improving beginning teachers' skills and performance and four of those survey statements (13, 18, 26 and 31) were found to be significant based on the chi square analysis.

Table 10

Significance of Survey Statement Responses in Relation to Supporting Teacher Morale, Communications, and Collegiality

Survey Statement	Chi Square Values	Asymp. Sig.
3. Orientation provided	7.000	.030
4. Attended orientation	8.333	.016
6. Introductions at orientation	7.000	.030
8. Introduction at school	4.333	.115
10. Tour of school	2.333	.311
11. Weekly time for mentor meetings	12.000	.017
17. Principal provided material/supplies	10.889	.012
21. Know where to direct questions	7.000	.030
22. Feel comfortable asking for assistance	2.333	.311
23. Primarily seeks mentor for challenges/concerns	4.222	.377

Six of the ten survey statements pertaining to supporting teacher morale, communications, and collegiality were found to have significance based on chi square analysis. Those six survey statements were numbered 3, 4, 6, 11, 17, and 21.

Table 11

Significance of Survey Statement Responses in Relation to Building a Sense of Professionalism and Positive Attitude

Survey Statement	Chi Square Values	Asymp. Sig.
3. Orientation provided	7.000	.030
4. Attended orientation	8.333	.016
8. Introduction at school	4.333	.115
18. Principal accessible	13.111	.004
24. Mentor celebrates accomplishments	13.556	.004
25. Principal celebrates accomplishments	6.444	.092
28. School staff development relevant	6.444	.092
29. System staff development relevant	4.667	.198

Based on chi square analysis, four of the eight survey statements (3, 4, 18, and 24) focused on the Beginning Teacher Support Program objective of building a sense of professionalism and positive attitudes were found to have significance.

Table 12

Significance of Survey Statement Responses in Relation to Facilitating a Smooth Transition into the First and Second Years of Teaching

Survey Statement	Chi Square Values	Asymp. Sig.
1. College preparation	4.667	.198
2. College support	1.333	.513
3. Orientation provided	7.000	.030
4. Attended orientation	8.333	.016
5. Relevance of orientation	2.444	.485
6. Introductions at orientation	7.000	.030
8. Introduction at school	4.333	.115
10. Tour of school	2.333	.311

Eight survey items in the Beginning Teachers Survey were focused on the Beginning Teacher Support Program objective of facilitating a smooth transition into the first and second years of teaching. Three of those items, survey statements 3, 4, and 6, were found to have significance based on chi square analysis.

Table 13

Significance of Survey Statement Responses in Relation to Putting Theory into Practice

Survey Statement	Chi Square Values	Asymp. Sig.
12. Mentor experience in same grade/subject	2.556	.635
15. Mentor encourages reflection	4.333	.115
16. Reflection is part of regular routine	11.333	.010
19. Principal encourages reflection	16.667	.001
26. Principal encourages staff development	10.889	.012
27. Self selection of staff development	8.111	.088
33. Implementation of staff development strategies	12.667	.005
37. Instructional technique improved with mentor guidance	2.444	.485

Putting theory into practice was the fifth objective of the Beginning Teacher Support Program and eight survey statements were utilized as a means of determining if the objective was met. Based on chi square analysis, half of the survey statements, items 16, 19, 26, and 33, were found to be significant.

Table 14

Significance of Survey Statement Responses in Relation to Preventing Teacher Isolation

Survey Statement	Chi Square Values	Asymp. Sig.
8. Introduction at school	4.333	.115
9. Prompt mentor assignment	9.111	.028
10. Tour of school	2.333	.311
11. Weekly time for mentor meetings	12.000	.017
12. Mentor experience in same grade/subject	2.556	.635
20. Mentor helped prepare for classroom observations	7.778	.051
36. Seek mentor when frustrated	7.556	.109
38. Developed friendships with colleagues	1.471	.225
39. Colleague and friend network at school	8.941	.011

Of the nine survey statements pertaining to objective of preventing teacher isolation, one-third (statements 9, 11, and 39) were found to be significant through chi square analysis.

Table 15

Significance of Survey Statement Responses in Relation to Building Self Reflection

Survey Statement	Chi Square Values	Asymp. Sig.
15. Mentor encourages reflection	4.333	.115
16. Reflection is part of regular routine	11.333	.010
19. Principal encourages reflection	16.667	.001
30. Staff Development includes reflection	6.000	.112

Four survey items in the Beginning Teachers Survey were focused on the Beginning Teacher Support Program objective of building self-reflection. Two of those items, survey statements 16 and 19, were found to have significance based on chi square analysis.

Table 16

Significance of Survey Statement Responses in Relation to Retaining Quality Teachers

Survey Statement	Chi Square Values	Asymp. Sig.
9. Prompt mentor assignment	9.111	.028
17. Principal provided material/supplies	10.889	.012
31. Staff Development throughout year	6.333	.042
34. Principal support	10.529	.015
35. Mentor support	.889	.346
40. Plan to teach five more years in system	5.059	.281

Retaining quality teachers was the final objective of the Beginning Teacher Support Program and six survey statements were utilized as a means of determining if the objective was met. Based on the chi square analysis, two-thirds of the survey statements, items 9, 17, 31, and 34, were found to be significant.

Summary

The purpose of the research was to determine the impact of the Beginning Teacher Support Program on the retention rate of the focus school system. Data was collected through survey responses, focus group discussions and individual interviews. After the data collection was complete, the data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed while focusing on the objectives of the school system's Beginning Teacher Support Program, which became the research themes.

Analysis of the data indicated that the beginning teachers were being served through the Beginning Teacher Support Program. Some discrepancies, including the beginning teachers' need for more time with mentors, and mentor assignment, were discussed. A chi square goodness of fit test was calculated comparing the frequency of the response options to the survey statements (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree,

strongly agree). It was hypothesized that each value would occur an equal number of times. Significant deviation from the hypothesized values was found ($\chi^2(5) = 25.48, p < .05$) in 17 of the survey statement responses (Cronk, 2008).

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the Beginning Teacher Support Program on the teacher retention rate in a rural school system in northwest North Carolina.

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What were conditions that warranted an induction program?
2. What was the LEA doing to address teacher retention?
3. Was the teacher induction program being followed as designed?
4. Did the induction program meet its objective?

The data reported in Chapter 4 involved collection from several different processes: surveys of beginning teachers from the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years; focus group discussions with beginning teachers; focus group discussion with mentors; interview with mentor coordinator; and interview with assistant superintendent for human resources.

Interpretation of Results

Based on the data discussed in Chapter 4, conclusions will be presented and addressed by key questions.

1. What were the conditions that warranted an

induction program?

The focus school system realized the national trends for teacher attrition were of serious consequence to beginning teachers. More than one in three beginning teachers across the country leaves the profession prior to completing 5 years in the classroom (Bolich, 2001). The focus school system central office administrators were concerned with an elevated level of attrition among beginning teachers (Wilson & Scott, 2008). The school system turnover rate of beginning teachers for the 2005-2006 school year was a substantial 20.8% (Scott, 2008). As a means of increasing the retention rate, the focus school system implemented a new Beginning Teacher Support Program in the 2006-2007 school year.

2. What was the LEA doing to address teacher retention?

The goals of the school system's Beginning Teacher Support Program included: hiring retired master teachers to mentor first and second year beginning teachers; providing veteran teachers the opportunity to share their experience and expertise with beginning teachers; matching the mentor and mentee certification areas; coordinating and ensuring high quality mentoring; assisting beginning teachers in defining and developing effective instructional practices and classroom management techniques; assisting beginning

teachers with effective performance of their duties and responsibilities; and increasing teacher retention in the profession (Scott, 2008).

Based on the data presented in Chapter 4, slightly fewer than half of the beginning teachers felt that their mentors had assisted them in preparing for classroom observations while slightly more than half of the beginning teachers indicated that their professional technique had improved as a result of the guidance from their mentors. Concerning matching mentor and mentee certification areas, the beginning teachers were divided as to agreement and disagreement of the achievement of the goal. Almost half of the beginning teachers (44%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that their mentor has experience in the same grade level/subject. The mentor coordinator expressed the assignment of mentors by matching certification areas as a merit of the Beginning Teacher Support Program by stating, "They're aligned based on their expertise licensure area which also makes for a better experience for them" (B. J. Scott, personal communication, February 9, 2009). During the Beginning Teacher focus group discussions, a beginning teacher commented on the frustration of having been assigned a mentor who did not share their certification area by saying, "I am on my second mentor and neither one

of them have been a PE teacher in the past -- so they understand teaching aspects but maybe not curriculum aspects" (Anonymous, personal communication, January 28, 2009).

Coordinating and ensuring high quality mentoring was a goal that, based on responses from Beginning Teachers Surveys, was met. Two-thirds of the beginning teachers indicated by survey response that time was reserved in their weekly schedules to meet with mentors and even more beginning teachers, 88.89%, indicated that their mentor meets with them on a regular basis. Both of the survey statements were also found to have significance based on the chi square analysis. Although beginning teachers reported that they would not seek out their mentor as the primary person when challenges, concerns, or problems arise, they did report positively that time was provided in weekly schedules to meet with mentors and those meetings do happen on a regular basis. The beginning teachers agreed unanimously, 100%, that they felt supported by their mentor with a majority responding that their mentors celebrated accomplishments with them. In the focus groups, beginning teachers talked about receiving hugs from mentors and one beginning teacher stated, "My mentor always gives me a hug before she leaves so it is nice to have that little hug you

know, throughout the day to make you feel better"

(Anonymous, personal communication, January 28, 2009).

Another beginning teacher reported about her mentor, "...she is there to listen. She makes me feel better about it.

That's what I appreciate from having a mentor" (Anonymous, personal communication).

Regarding the Beginning Teacher Support Program goal of mentors assisting beginning teachers in defining and developing effective instructional practices and classroom management techniques, none of the beginning teachers provided a negative response, indicating that mentors have encouraged beginning teachers to reflect on successes and challenges in the classroom. Slightly more than half of beginning teachers believe that their instructional technique has improved as a result of guidance from their mentor. However, many of the beginning teachers in the focus groups commented about the desire to have more input in the professional development selection process.

Comments of beginning teachers during the focus groups illustrated their desire for professional development that was more closely correlated to their needs and interests: "going to a specialized convention, it's just like, I get excited and I am ready to teach and do different things" (Anonymous, personal communication, January 28, 2009); "I

feel like I got way more out of those few days that I spent at that conference than I did from any of the training and sessions that we have had" (Anonymous, personal communication); "I just need basic kind of stuff to get through the day or the semester" (Anonymous, personal communication); and "I think it would be helpful to set aside some time for us to observe other teachers, especially a teacher in your specific content area who has been doing it for a long time" (Anonymous, personal communication). Others commented on the timing of the professional development offered during the orientation provided to beginning teachers by saying: "It didn't make any sense at all, taking that time away from us when we could have been preparing what we needed to prepare and getting our class ready" (Anonymous, personal communication); and "Maybe it would have been beneficial for us to be in the classroom for a few days or a little while so that we can think about personal experiences that we could use it for" (Anonymous, personal communication). As a response to an open-ended question on the Beginning Teachers Survey, one new teacher noted, "I have not pursued any other staff development due to the volume I am already required to attend" (Anonymous, personal communication).

Pertaining to the goal that expected mentors to assist

beginning teachers with effective performance of their duties and responsibilities, most of the data gathered through surveys and focus group discussions indicated that this goal has been met. Less than 1% (0.05) of beginning teachers indicated that their mentors did not help them prepare for classroom observations. Over half of beginning teachers, 55.56%, indicated that their instructional technique had improved as a result of guidance from their mentors, as noted in survey statement number 37. In surveys and focus groups, beginning teachers reported that mentors assisted them with a variety of responsibilities including preparing for classroom observations, maintaining Data Notebooks, developing Individual Growth Plans, providing management tips, creating lesson plans, and surviving health department inspections.

Regarding the Beginning Teacher Support Program's final goal of increasing retention, over half of the beginning teacher survey respondents, 55.56%, indicated that they would continue teaching in the focus school system for the next 5 years. During the 2005-2006 school year, 20.8% of beginning teachers did not return. During the 2006-2007 school year, the beginning teacher turnover rate decreased to 16.9% and in the 2007-2008 school year, the beginning teacher turnover rate decreased further to

13.2% (Scott, 2008).

3. Was the teacher induction program being followed as designed?

The program objectives for the focus school system's Beginning Teacher Support Program included: improving beginning teachers' skills and performance; supporting teacher morale, communications, and collegiality; building a sense of professionalism and positive attitude; facilitating a smooth transition into the first and second years of teaching; putting theory into practice; preventing teacher isolation; building self-reflection; and retaining quality teachers. In the focus groups, beginning teachers and mentors spent much of the conversation, 38.3%, discussing communication and morale. Comments made by beginning teachers during the focus group indicated that they had many questions throughout their first year of teaching. One beginning teacher stated:

A lot of times your first year, I think you are left to figure things out on our own but there is no easy access to the answers and having the mentor at the beginning of the year can help with that. (Anonymous, personal communication, January 28, 2009)

Other remarks included: "If people don't tell you things, you just don't know them and don't do them because

you didn't know to do them" (Anonymous, personal communication, January 28, 2009); and "I needed help clarifying all the paperwork that is involved" (Anonymous, personal communication).

The theme of isolation was discussed 104 times, comprising 11.06% of the focus group discussions. Beginning teachers discussed ways that they have felt isolated during the first year and, in addition to trying to fit into previously established grade-level teams, the assignment of a mentor who is not physically located in the same grade level, hallway or even the same school, created another type of isolation. Beginning teachers were asked during focus group discussions, "How could have your mentor have helped more?" Responses included: "Be available in the school a little bit more, with the schedule" (Anonymous, personal communication, January 28, 2009); "...having someone there that we know is going to be there without having to make a phone call would be better" (Anonymous, personal communication); "It seems like they could have done a better job coinciding our visits with our planning period" (Anonymous, personal communication); and "...like a fellow colleague...and that person to me has been more of a mentor than anybody and it's nice because she is right down the hall, she's there, she's accessible" (Anonymous, personal

communication). The associate superintendent for human resources indicated during her interview that the technology in the school system is an excellent recruiting incentive and also is a future opportunity for increased communication and networking for beginning teachers through the development of interactive opportunities which would allow beginning teachers to talk with others with similar issues and concerns and eliminate feelings of isolation within the school or system.

Although beginning teachers did not appear to understand the scheduling practice of their mentors as evidenced by comments such as, "Last year, she was there quite often and I don't know if it's the way they are supposed to do things but my second year, I haven't seen her hardly at all" (Anonymous, personal communication, January 28, 2009) and "Some days, she pops in during my planning and I can sit down and actually talk to her as opposed to coming in and stopping what I am doing and leaving which is the way it is sometimes" (Anonymous, personal communication), the mentor coordinator explained the time allocation and level of support for each beginning teacher and identical information was provided in the Beginning Teacher Handbook that was presented to Beginning Teachers during orientation.

Beginning teachers made comments during Focus group discussions that indicated the frustration they felt concerning the responsibilities that they faced as beginning teachers, including curriculum, school culture, professional development, implementation of new strategies or programs, record keeping or data collection, and finding enough time to get everything completed. Mentors made similar comments during the mentor focus group discussion. One mentor stated, "There is just too much for them to do" (Anonymous, personal communication, February 9, 2009). Another commented, "They don't really have time to digest information from one workshop before they are having to take another workshop... and it's just a little too much I think for them" (Anonymous, personal communication). Mentors discussed the expectations that were placed on beginning teachers including professional learning communities, lesson plan preparation, studying and mastering curriculum, professional development opportunities and expectations, meetings with little or no prior notice, grading papers, and varying requirements from school to school.

Discussing requirements at each school, including submitting lesson plans to the principals, required team meetings, and grade-level planning sessions. Another mentor

commented, "I think it would be good if there could be more consistency throughout the county" (Anonymous, personal communication, February 9, 2009). Mentors also suggested the levels of expectations of different principals throughout the county have an impact on the morale of the beginning teachers. Based on the focus group discussions, beginning teachers realized that mentors were not aware of all the different expectations at each school. One beginning teacher commented about her mentor, "Sometimes, you know, what she may tell me is true or not true at one school. Sometimes it was misleading because what may be correct at one school is not correct here and vice versa" (Anonymous, personal communication, January 28, 2009).

Building self-reflection was the Beginning Teacher Support Program objective that was not at the forefront of the focus group discussions and interviews. Self-reflection comprised only 2.66% of the focus group discussions for mentors and beginning teachers and 3.1% of the interviews with the mentor coordinator and the assistant superintendent for human resources. Four statements on the Beginning Teacher Survey focused on retention, as encouraged by mentor, principal, professional development experiences, or through self direction. Beginning teachers responded positively to each survey statement concerning

self-reflection, with 88.89% agreeing or strongly agreeing that reflection was encouraged by mentors and reflection is part of their weekly routine. Over three quarters of the beginning teachers responded positively to indicate that their principal encourages or requires reflection processes such as written journals, logs or discussions and this survey statement was found to have significance through the chi square analysis. A little more than half of the beginning teachers agreed or strongly agreed that reflection opportunities were incorporated in staff development experiences.

4. Did the induction program meet its objective?

The school system has determined four areas of focus for evaluation of the Beginning Teacher Support Program: retaining quality teachers; improving instructional performance; supporting teacher morale, communication, and collegiality; and facilitating a seamless transition into the first year of teaching (Scott, 2008).

Retaining quality teachers is a goal that the system is working toward with the decreasing number of beginning teacher turnover each year since the Beginning Teacher Support Program has been implemented. In the 2005-2006 school year, 20.8% of the beginning teachers did not return. The following school year, 2006-2007, the beginning

teacher turnover rate decreased to 16.9% and in the 2007-2008 school year, the decline continued with 13.2% of the beginning teachers not returning (Scott, 2008). Beginning Teachers Surveys were distributed to all beginning teachers during the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years, even those who were no longer employees of the focus school system. Based on the Beginning Teachers Survey results, more than half of the new teachers plan to continue teaching in the focus school system for 5 more years. Six survey statements pertained to the retention of quality teachers. Based on the chi square analysis, two-thirds of those statements, items 9, 17, 31, and 34, were found to be significant. As a response to one of the open-ended survey questions, a beginning teacher who was no longer teaching in the school system was positive: "The resources provided for me in Wilkes County were exceptional. My mentor was a wonderful encourager. She helped me get through many difficult moments relating to my first year" (Anonymous, personal communication, January 20, 2009). Another former employee noted, "I am no longer there...what I do remember is that it was a great place to teach" (Anonymous, personal communication).

Based on Beginning Teachers Survey responses, new teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their instructional

performance has improved through reflection (55.6%), staff development (88.9%), and mentor guidance (55.6%).

Supporting teacher morale, communication, and collegiality were themes that were interwoven during the data collection and analysis process. Communication was discussed most frequently in focus groups and interviews. Communication strengths and concerns can impact both teacher morale and collegiality. Based on comments from beginning teachers during focus groups, mentors were often the liaison for principals and colleagues or a conduit of information concerning the school system, the curriculum, and other responsibilities. However, when the mentors did not have the specific information for each school or when the beginning teachers did not realize additional information or instructions were needed, the communication lines were easily disconnected. Through focus group discussion, it was evident that when beginning teachers were reaching out for a friend or beginning to build a network of colleagues, the mentor was often the first point of contact.

Facilitating a seamless transition into the first year of teaching was determined by the researcher to include time constraints that beginning teachers faced, time with mentors, suggestions for improving the Beginning Teacher Support Program and differences between college preparation

and the beginning year of teaching. It was evident through focus group discussions, interviews, and the Beginning Teacher Surveys that beginning teachers had difficulty in finding the time to meet all the requirements and responsibilities of their positions: lesson planning; grade level and team meetings; professional development; school duties; and implementation of school system program initiatives. Beginning teachers reported, during focus group discussions, being at school late in the evenings and on weekends. Mentors corroborated by making similar statements during a separate focus group discussion, "It's not unusual for them to call me at 8:00 or 9:00 at night and they'll still be at school working on something" (Anonymous, personal communication, February 9, 2009). The assistant superintendent from human resources listed time management as one of her main concerns for beginning teachers.

Beginning teachers also craved more time with mentors. While the Beginning Teachers Survey revealed that time was reserved in the weekly schedule for mentor meetings and those meetings occurred regularly, the beginning teachers expressed a desire to have meetings with mentors during planning time, to allow for a freer exchange of ideas and a more lengthy conversation without the students in the

classroom. Beginning teachers also stressed their need to have mentors available at their school site daily or more regularly, rather than relying on phone calls and emails between mentor visits.

The Beginning Teacher focus group discussions produced several suggestions for improvement opportunities for the Beginning Teacher Support Program. Suggestions voiced by beginning teachers included hiring more mentors so each mentor would not have to divide time between so many beginning teachers and allowing beginning teachers to select some professional development activities based on interest or individual need. The beginning teachers also suggested rescheduling required professional development opportunities so that more time at the beginning of the school year could be spent in the classroom and workshop sessions could be more evenly spread out throughout the semester. In doing so, the scheduling revisions would allow beginning teachers time to develop a need for the staff development opportunity and provide them with the opportunity to internalize and implement strategies from each professional development experience.

When analyzing the differences between college preparation and the beginning year of teaching, 72.22% of the beginning teachers responded to the survey by agreeing

or strongly agreeing that their college sufficiently prepared them to be a teacher while two-thirds responded positively to receiving ample support from their college to begin their teaching careers. However, in the focus group discussions, beginning teachers indicated that they did not know how to streamline the lesson planning process to a more reasonable time frame, nor did they know how to maintain student records, create report cards or complete other documentation required of classroom teachers. The mentor focus group discussion revealed that the mentors have recognized these needs and others, such as effective practices for parent conferences. Additionally, the mentors were willing to assist beginning teachers in acquiring the skills and strategies they need to be successful.

Implications of Findings

The mentors were the primary component of the Beginning Teacher Support Program and beginning teachers have indicated through survey responses and focus group discussions that they feel supported by mentors and their instructional practice has improved as a result of guidance from their mentors. Through focus group discussions, beginning teachers indicated the realization that the mentors had a large workload which often encompassed different school sites. While recognizing the ability to

communicate through phone calls and emails, beginning teachers preferred to have mentors permanently located at their own schools for easier access. Staff development opportunities were available and required of beginning teachers; however, the new teachers would rather have input in the choice in the professional development experiences, with more time spent in the classroom at the beginning of the school year. The orientation provided for beginning teachers was comprehensive and somewhat overwhelming.

It was noted by the researcher that there was a difference in the frequency of themes of the two beginning teacher focus group discussions. The focus group discussion that included beginning teachers from the 2007-2008 school year yielded a considerable increase in the frequency of each theme. With no specific or statistical reason for this notable difference, the increase in the frequency of themes discussed could have been attributed to beginning teachers from the 2007-2008 school year recalling the first year of teaching experience from just the previous year while the beginning teachers from the 2006-2007 school year did not recall as many experiences from the first year of teaching because it was not as recent.

Limitations

The Beginning Teachers Survey was sent to all

beginning teachers from the 2006-2007 and the 2007-2008 school years. However, some of the surveys were returned to the researcher as undeliverable. Response, completion, and submission of the survey were voluntary and the response rate was not 100%. Twenty-five percent of the beginning teachers for each school were invited to the focus groups but not all of those invited were able to attend. Of the nine mentors, three were not present for the mentor focus group discussion. The research focused on and involved only those teachers who were a part of the initially licensed teacher process; no lateral entry teachers or teachers who did not hold a clear teaching license were included in the research.

Recommendations

1. Continue to closely monitor mentor assignment to ensure that the mentor's certification area matches the beginning teacher's certification area.

2. Employ at least one mentor with a background in physical education, art, music, or other non-core curriculum course. If funding is not available to dedicate one mentor position for each non-core curricular area needed, then the school system could consider contracting with retired master teachers with certification areas that match beginning teachers as the needs arise. For example,

if the school system only has one beginning teacher with a physical education license, then a mentor could be contracted for the time needed to serve one beginning teacher each week.

3. Consider basing the mentors at particular school sites on consistent days so teachers have more face-to-face access to mentors during the school day.

4. Allow beginning teachers to have input in the mentor schedule or encourage mentors to visit beginning teachers at convenient times (during planning or particular subject area as desired by beginning teacher).

5. Alter the professional development opportunities provided during the annual orientation to resemble more of a conference schedule with breakout sessions. Allow beginning teachers to alternate between required sessions and sessions of their choice.

6. Provide only the staff development that is absolutely necessary at the beginning of the school year. Reserve time after the first quarter and the first semester for additional staff development for beginning teachers.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the data collected and the findings of this study, the researcher has noted two recommendations for further research.

One recommendation for further research has emerged as a result of one of the limitations of this study. Lateral entry teachers and teachers who do not possess a clear teaching license were not included in this research. It would be interesting to conduct similar research involving new teachers who were beginning their teaching careers without the resources or formal involvement in the Beginning Teacher Support Program.

Another recommendation for further research would be to select a larger school system which has implemented a similar program of employing retired master teachers to serve as mentors for beginning teachers. Researching the strengths of such a program in a larger school system may motivate other systems and/or state level officials to recommend or require similar programs.

Summation Statement

This study was conducted because the attrition rate among new teachers across the nation is staggering. As the teacher turnover rates rise, so does the cost to our educational system, both financially and academically. Teachers are the central component to the quality of education provided to our students, our future. New teacher induction programs are not only beneficial to beginning teachers, but to administrators, students, and the

community because turnover rates decrease with induction programs in place (Mitchell, 2003).

By researching a Beginning Teacher Support Program that features retired master teachers as mentors, the researcher was able to determine components of goals and objectives of the program that were successful. The purpose of this study allowed the researcher to examine the teacher induction program of a rural school system in North Carolina. By determining the effects of mentor assignment, ongoing professional development, master teacher observation opportunities, structured reflection and self-assessment, and other support offered at the system level to beginning teachers, this study determined the effect of the Beginning Teacher Support Program in the focus school system's retention rate.

Findings in this study indicated that beginning teachers feel supported by their mentors, have improved their instructional strategies as a result of involvement in the Beginning Teacher Support Program, have access to a wealth of professional development opportunities and regularly engage in self-reflection of classroom challenges and successes. The attrition rate of new teachers in the focus school system has steadily decreased since the implementation and as a result of the Beginning Teacher

Support Program.

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Appendix A

Program Objectives and Key Themes

Program Objectives and Key Themes

Program Objectives	Key Themes
Improving beginning teachers' skills and performance	A
Supporting teacher morale, communications, and collegiality	B
Building a sense of professionalism and positive attitude	C
Facilitating a smooth transition into the first and second years of teaching	D
Putting theory into practice	E
Preventing teacher isolation	F
Building self-reflection	G
Retaining quality teachers	H

Appendix B

Responses to Survey for Beginning Teachers Correlated to Key Themes

Responses to Survey for Beginning Teachers
Correlated to Key Themes

	Theme	Response
1. My college sufficiently prepared me to be a teacher.	D	
2. I received ample support from college to begin my teaching career.	D	
3. My school system provided an orientation prior to the start of my first year of teaching.	BCD	
4. I attended the orientation.	BCD	
5. The orientation was relevant to my questions about beginning teaching in this school system.	D	
6. During the orientation, key personnel from the central office were introduced and contact information was provided.	DB	
7. Classroom management was addressed at the orientation.	A	
8. Within the first workdays, I was introduced to the faculty at my school.	BCDF	
9. I was promptly assigned a mentor upon being hired in this school system.	FH	
10. A tour of the school was provided.	BDF	
11. Time is reserved in my weekly schedule to meet with my mentor.	BF	
12. My mentor has experience in the same grade level/subject that I teach.	AEF	
13. My mentor meets with me on a regular basis.	A	
14. My mentor is available at times other than meeting times if I need assistance.	A	

	Theme	Response
15. My mentor has encouraged me to reflect on successes and challenges in the classroom.	EG	
16. Reflecting on the impact of classroom activities is part of my daily or weekly routine.	EG	
17. My principal and/or assistant principal has/have offered to provide supplies and materials for my classroom.	BH	
18. My principal is accessible if I need assistance.	AC	
19. My principal encourages me or requires me to reflect on instructional technique through written journals or logs or discussion.	EG	
20. My mentor has helped prepare me for classroom observations.	AF	
21. If I have a question, I know who to ask.	B	
22. If I have a question, I feel comfortable asking for assistance.	B	
23. My mentor is the primary person I seek out when I have challenges/concerns/problems.	B	
24. My mentor celebrates accomplishments with me.	C	
25. My principal celebrates accomplishments with me.	C	
26. My principal encourages me to attend staff development that will enhance my instructional technique.	AE	
27. I have pursued staff development opportunities based on my choice.	AE	
28. The staff development that I am required to attend at the school level is relevant to my needs.	AC	

	Theme	Response
29. The staff development I am required to attend at the county level is relevant to my needs.	AC	
30. Staff Development opportunities include an opportunity to reflect on past successes and challenges.	G	
31. I have received staff development throughout the year.	AH	
32. All of the staff development I have attended is at the beginning of the year.	A	
33. I have implemented strategies learned during staff development opportunities into my classroom.	E	
34. I feel supported by my principal.	H	
35. I feel supported by my mentor.	H	
36. When I am frustrated at school, I would seek help from my mentor.	F	
37. My instructional technique has improved as a result of guidance from my mentor.	AE	
38. I have developed friendships with colleagues at school.	F	
39. There is a network of friends and colleagues I can depend on for help or support at school.	F	
40. I plan to teach in this system for five more years.	H	
41. Do you have additional comments concerning your experience as a beginning teacher?		
42. Do you have additional comments concerning the relationship with your mentor?		

Appendix C

Focus Group Questions for Beginning Teachers

*Focus Group Questions**Beginning Teachers*

What challenges have you faced during the school year?

What successes have you enjoyed during the school year?

Talk about your mentor.

Has your mentor assisted you?

How could have your mentor have helped more?

What staff development opportunities have you had this year?

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions for Mentors

*Focus Group Questions**Mentors*

How are beginning teachers doing?

What are concerns you have for beginning teachers?

What do beginning teachers need most from you?

Talk about the mentor/mentee relationship.

How is morale among beginning teachers?

How has staff development helped beginning teachers?

Appendix E

Interview Questions for Mentor Coordinator

*Interview Questions**Mentor Coordinator*

What are the merits to the Beginning Teacher Support Program?

What is included in the orientation?

How are mentors selected?

How are mentors assigned?

How are mentor schedules designed?

How are staff development opportunities selected for beginning teachers?

What networking experiences are provided for beginning teachers?

What assistance is provided to beginning teachers to ease the transition into the classroom?

How is self-reflection encouraged?

Appendix F

Interview Questions for Assistant Superintendent

*Interview Questions**Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources*

What is one of main concerns for beginning teachers?

How does the school system address the needs of beginning teachers?

What are the retention goals of the school system?

How are beginning teachers treated as professionals?

Explain the communication strengths and weaknesses in your school system.